FBI rarely acted against Klan

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WASHINGTON (AP) — A top FBI official Tuesday called the campaign against the Ku Klux Klan the bureau's "finest hour." But a one-time informant said agents rarely acted to head off Klan attacks against blacks and civil rights workers.

The informant, Gary Thomas Rowe Jr., who wore a hood to mask his face, told the Senate Intelligence Committee that FBI officials condoned his participation in acts of violence while he was a Klan member from 1960 to 1965. They also ordered him to gain information and sow dissension within the Klan by sleeping with the wives of as many Klan members as possible, he said.

James B. Adams, the FBI's deputy associate director for investigation, testified Rowe never was told to involve himself in violence or sexual activities.

However, Sen. Walter D. Huddleston, D-Ky., said Rowe's control agent has in effect corroborated his story by telling the committee Rowe "couldn't be an angel and be a good informant."

Sen. Walter Mondale, DMinn., told Adams the record now is clear that while the FBI is the world's best law enforcement agency, it is a consistent bungler in the field of political activities.

It interfered with civil liberties and finally heaped shame upon itself, Mondale said.

Rowe said he warned the FBI three weeks in advance about plans by the Klan to attack Freedom Riders in Birmingham, Ala.

He said the attack took place as planned as the Klan moved in with baseball bats, clubs, chains and pistols after having been promised free rein for 15 minutes by members of the

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Birmingham police force.

Rowe said that when he asked the FBI why nothing had been done to prevent the attack, he was told, "Who in the hell were we going to report it to? The police department was involved."

Rowe said the Klan got extensive help from the police department and county sheriff's department in Birmingham and was allowed unlimited access to the police department's intelligence files on civil rights orders.

He said Klan members often rode in police cars to keep track of civil rights activities.

Rowe, a burly man whose thickset features were only partially concealed by the rudely fashioned white cloth mask, described another incident in which a judge in Birmingham returned to the Klan weapons which had been confiscated by Alabama State Highway police.

The incident occurred in 1963 as Klan members were traveling to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa to support Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace, who had proclaimed his intention of standing in the schoolroom door to prevent the university's integration.

Rowe, who now lives in California under an assumed identity, did not identify the judge. He said the judge slapped him on the shoulder, called him a "good American" and told him to take the weapons and "put them to good use."

Rowe said his FBI contacts were astonished when he displayed the weapons cache in the trunk of his car.

Rowe said the FBI told him to take any action he could to disrupt and discredit the Klan, including spying on the sex lives of Klan members in order to "pass the word around and to cause dissension in their homes."

"I was told to sleep with as many wives as I could ... to break up marriages," Rowe said. He did not say in his testimony whether he actually had sexual relations with wives of Klan members.

The charge that he was even instructed to do so was denied under oath by Adams.

Adams said that at the height of the FBI's campaign against the Klan about 6 per cent of the Klan were FBI informants. The Klan thought up to 50 per cent of its members were FBI informants, he added. Because the Klan was insecure, he said, it became violent.

Adams acknowledged the FBI made some mistakes but said he does not believe a balanced picture of its achievements has emerged because "of the necessity to zero in on abuses."

"I think our accomplishment with the Klan was the FBI's finest hour."

Committee members noted that the FBI's campaign against the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. began in 1962 after King refused to discuss with the FBI his charge that the bureau's activities in the South were "aiding segregationists."

Citing Rowe's testimony and information gathered by the committee staff, Sen. Gary Hart, D-Colo., said it now appears Dr. King was right. "And that the bureau was either deceiving itself or not telling the truth."